

Repeated Measures Analysis of Alcohol Patterns among Gay and Bisexual Men in the Momentum Health Study

What are the patterns of alcohol consumption among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men in Metro Vancouver, Canada?

What is the importance of this study?

- Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) have shown to engage in high levels of problem drinking including heavy episodic drinking and/or binge drinking.
- There is a link between drinking levels and sexual/cultural factors relevant to gbMSM.
- Culturally, alcohol use has been highlighted in gay bars and clubs, which have historically and continue to serve as sites of socialization, identity forming and movement building.

FACT BOX

Studies have found that gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men who binge drink are much more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviours.

How was this study conducted?

- Participants were asked about their alcohol use patterns over multiple visits, and these patterns were tested for associations with a number of factors including socio-demographic and psycho-social, as well as those related to sexual behaviour, substance use and gay community involvement.

What are the key study findings?

- Based on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test, a validated tool used to classify groups according to alcohol use, at baseline (start of study) 60% of gbMSM who participated in the test were classified as Non-Hazardous Drinkers while 40% were classified as Hazardous Drinkers.
- Among gbMSM in Metro Vancouver, it appears that rates of hazardous drinking are decreasing over time, as the cohort ages.
- Compared to Non-Hazardous Drinkers, Hazardous Drinkers were significantly younger, had higher levels of anxiety and were more likely to attend gay bars/clubs. In contrast, they were less likely to be HIV-positive and to use internet sites to seek sexual partners.
- Hazardous Drinkers were not more likely to engage in high-risk sex compared to Non-Hazardous Drinkers.
- When looking at “always” Hazardous Drinkers compared to “sometimes” Hazardous Drinkers, those who were “always” Hazardous Drinkers were more likely to have lower self-esteem. They were also more likely to report higher incomes, attend gay bars more often, self-identify as Indigenous, use ecstasy and report high-risk sex.



What do these findings mean?

- Trends in hazardous drinking appear to be decreasing over time, or as cohort members age, and no associations were found between hazardous drinking and sexual behaviour.
- However, this study found an important subgroup of hazardous drinkers: those who were “always” hazardous drinkers (as opposed to “sometimes”). These individuals were more likely to be young, report high-risk sex and frequent gay bars among other factors. For this group, gay bars remain important social centres to meet friends and sexual partners, which may lead to higher levels of high-risk sex.
- Given the characteristics of “always” Hazardous Drinkers, effective gbMSM alcohol intervention may benefit from focusing on Social Norms Theory, which has been successfully applied to young drinkers.
- What is Social Norms Theory? When asked to provide estimates, survey participants uniformly overestimate their peers’ risky behavior relative to their own. When shown the results of their estimates, participants’ risky behavior usually decreases.

What is the BC-CfE Momentum Health Study?

Evidence from British Columbia and elsewhere has demonstrated the expansion of access to antiretroviral HIV treatment (ART) can result in population-level reductions in HIV incidence. This is the concept behind the made-in-BC Treatment as Prevention® strategy, or TasP®, which aims to expand early HIV testing and treatment to improve patients’ health and curb the spread of HIV. Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) represent the most affected HIV risk group, both in BC and Canada. The BC-CfE Momentum Health Study is designed to measure changes in HIV risk behaviour, attitudes toward TasP® and the proportion of HIV-positive gbMSM with unsuppressed viral load over time in the Vancouver region. The study uses respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to obtain a more representative sample reflecting the diversity of the gbMSM population in Vancouver.

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